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A Controlled, Rapid Approach to Curriculum Change

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A Controlled, Rapid Approach to Curriculum Change

by Judy Smeed

Teachers are continually bombarded with change programs for improvements in areas such as literacy and numeracy; however, the focus is often on the program and not on the results (Pertuzé, Calder, Greitzer & Lucas, 2010). When the inevitable failure follows (Fullan, 2005; Gross, Giacquinta & Bernstein, 1971), the school moves on to a new activities-based model. Traditionally, many change models, particularly in education, have been activities-centred (Schaffer & Thomson, 1992). This means that such models concentrate on activity, not on results or impact.

In response to this, the CRACC model (Smeed, 2009) was designed to resemble change models more closely aligned with the corporate world (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bennis, Benne & Chin, 1961; Schaffer & Thomson, 1992); that is, a results-driven model. Schaffer and Thomson (1992) conducted extensive research in the business arena and claimed that managers falsely assume results will materialise if activities-centred programs are initiated. Their research illustrated that change that is not results-driven will rarely lead to improvements. With these thoughts in mind, the CRACC model (Smeed, 2009) for externally managed curriculum change in schools was developed as a results-driven model, to show improvement within a short space of time. Details of the model are shown in Figure 1.

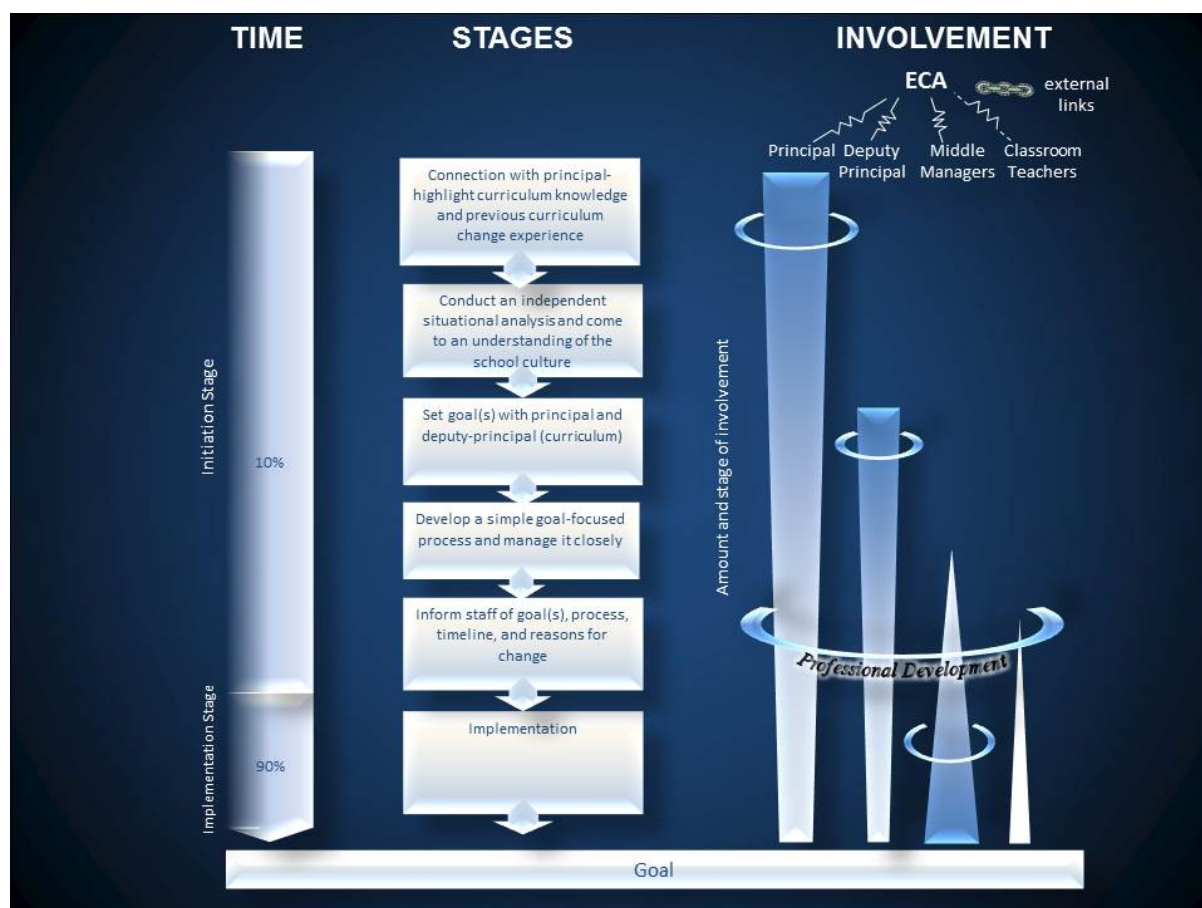


Figure 1: Controlled Rapid Approach to Curriculum Change (CRACC) Model

This model was developed for curriculum change which is **externally** managed by an external change agent (ECA). However, schools which are not engaging in change led from outside can adapt many of its features to assist in the facilitation of **internally** managed curriculum change. The following discussion of the CRACC model which was researched and developed in 2008-2009 outlines how the model was developed, taking into consideration the qualitative research done in three schools which undertook curriculum change processes with the external change agent (ECA) (the author). Recommendations for how schools might adapt these findings to assist their own internally led process are then provided.

The CRACC model

This model has been specifically designed to bring about curriculum change in schools. As shown in Figure 1, the model is composed of three facets: time, stages and involvement. The ‘time’ facet details when various processes occur during the curriculum change timeframe. The ‘stages’ facet outlines the sequence in which activities take place, and the ‘involvement’ facet indicates members of the teaching team who are involved and their relative degree of involvement. Each of the three facets will now be considered.

Time

In the current climate of accountability, principals cannot afford to let a change process meander aimlessly. This pressure on principals was given serious attention in the development of the original CRACC model (Smeed, 2009). In reality, ECA-facilitated change processes are restricted by time as well as budget limitations (Fullan, 2001), so one of the principles underpinning the original model was the development of an appropriate and tight timeline. The timeline was divided into two phases – initiation and implementation – mirroring two of the three educational change phases put forward by Fullan (1991). In line with Rogers (1983), these phases were presented as sequential as the initiation phase is considered to be a process through which an individual, or another decision-making unit or organisation (such as a school), must initially pass. In the CRACC model, the initiation phase is completed within 10% of the available time allocation, leaving 90% for the implementation phase. The model recommends a fast movement through initiation with contact limited to the principal and deputy principal. As most curriculum change processes flounder at initiation (Fullan, 2001), this model aims to preserve the energies of middle-management and classroom teachers for implementation.

Stages

The CRACC model outlined sequentially what activities had to take place in the initiation phase. During this phase, the ECA or change leader was required to: (1) connect with the principal (connection); (2) conduct an independent situational analysis (decipher); (3) set goal(s); (4) outline the change process; and (5) share information with staff (inform). Each of these five stages are now elaborated.

Stage 1: Connection

This stage highlighted the importance of the initial connection with the principal. In essence, an externally led curriculum change process does not occur in a school without the principal's support. The CRACC model recognised the importance of the principal's support and faith in the ECA's knowledge and track record in leading curriculum change. Once the principal was comfortable with the external person, the ECA then set about deciphering the situation.

Stage 2: Decipher

The deciphering stage allowed the ECA to make independent judgements about the school's context. Prior to the development of the CRACC model, the ECA relied on the perceptions of the principal to gain an understanding of the schools' needs. In conducting the relevant research for the CRACC model's development, it became clear that the ECA should seek information from wider sources. In response to this, the deciphering stage of initiation in the CRACC model involved conducting an independent situational analysis which incorporated the voices of more than just the school leader. In addition to the voices from within the school, the ECA conducts their own situational analysis from publically available information and performance data about a school.

The important value at this 'stage' is independence. The ECA listens to the principal and other school employees, analyses her own data, and puts forward some independent

thoughts about the performance of the school to which the principal and school leadership are asked to respond.

Stage 3: Set goals

The goal(s) are set in line with the data collected during the previous deciphering stage. However, in line with the thoughts of Hall and Hord (1987) that any long-term change success needs support from the leader, the goal had to be one that the principal was comfortable with and committed to. Additionally, the 'set goal' stage of the CRACC model can also assist in focusing and streamlining the process. The ECA had to bring about the desired changes quickly, so it was important she understood the goal(s) and developed a process for the delivery of the desired outcome.

Stage 4: Process development

In the research undertaken to develop the CRACC model, the participants strongly articulated the desire for a simple process. By this, they meant that it was easy to follow and that the requirements were specific. Therefore, in this stage the ECA developed a process which met the criterion of simplicity and one which could be closely overseen by the ECA. Once this process had the principal's support, it was then shared with staff.

Stage 5: Share

The CRACC model recommended that staff should be informed about the reasons for change, as well as the goal(s), the process and the timeline, but not until the final stage of initiation. This is contrary to advice from many writers and academics (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Luke, 2007) who suggest that decisions should be made in collaboration with staff. However, findings from the development of the original model refuted this claim: teachers strongly

articulated that they just wanted to be told what to do and the time frame in which they had to do it. They did not mind who had set the goal, but did want to know what it was and how the goal would be accomplished. Therefore, the CRACC model responded to this request by limiting the involvement of middle managers and classroom teachers until the sharing stage of the process.

Involvement

During the change process, the ECA worked with different professional levels in the school, moving from one level to the next. By ‘stepping’ the involvement of the ECA, the process could be closely managed and controlled. As the ECA moved from one professional level to the next, their time with the previous level decreased. In Figure 1, the CRACC model depicts the amount of time spent with each professional level by a widening or narrowing of the arrows and heavier shading where the main involvement occurred. Figure 1 also shows that the first contact was with the principal. After the initial meeting, the deputy principal was then invited into the process. The middle-managers were then introduced just before the implementation phase. Finally, the classroom teachers joined their leaders and managers.

Time spent working with the ECA was also considered professional development and was delivered in several ways: one-to-one (principal or deputy principal); to small groups (middle managers); and to whole groups (staff). Data gathered from the research which led to the construction of the original CRACC model suggested that all participants perceived professional development as an integral component of the change process. The ECA’s links to the wider educational community were articulated by all professional levels as an important asset. However, not all change processes are straightforward; there is always a degree of resistance. This is illustrated by the jagged lines as shown in Figure 1.

Recommendations for internally led curriculum change

Though the original CRACC model was developed to inform externally led curriculum change in schools, there is much to be gleaned from the research for use in internally led change. Some recommendations are as follows:

- Move quickly through the initiation stage into the implementation stage. Don't exhaust all energy and enthusiasm at the beginning;
- Control the entry and exit points of the participants. Involve each level as and when needed;
- Access data and other information from both internal and external sources;
- Be specific about goals; and,
- Simplify processes to achieve goals wherever possible.

Conclusion

In this current era of high-stakes accountability, schools have to quickly adapt to demands from their various stakeholders. To do this, school leaders need to know with some degree of certainty that any change process will produce a desired outcome. The CRACC model, designed along the lines of results-driven change and adapted from the world of business, gives the principal a controlled but rapid and focused way of implementing change in his/her school.

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